HEYLBUT ROSE

WHAT MUSIC MEANS TO HELEN KELLER

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What Music Means to Helen Keller

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By Rose Heylbut

THE NAME OF HELEN KELLER is indelibly written among those of the world's truly great. Born a normal, active child, she was stricken by an illness that deprived her of both sight and hearing, before she was two years old. In her seventh year, her instinctive need for expression became so urgent that she fell subject to passionate crying spells, the cause of which was apparent but the remedy for which seemed hopeless. Her parents, living in a small town in Alabama, were quite unversed in the special methods required to reach through to the ardent little being, who lacked both the visual and the aural impressions upon which to build normal understanding. On the advice of Alexander Graham Bell, Helen Keller's family applied to the Perkins Institution for the Blind, in Boston. There it was that Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe had devised a means of teaching Laura Bridgman who also was blind and deaf; there it was that a recent graduate of the Institution, Annie Mansfield Sullivan, was recommended to Captain Keller as teacher for his child. Thus began the personal life as well as the education of Helen Keller.

Miss Sullivan—later Mrs. Macy, but best known as Helen Keller's beloved "Teacher"—came to the child shortly before her seventh birthday. She found her an untamed little creature, with only such impressions as she had discovered for herself through her senses of touch, smell, and taste. She began to teach the girl by forming the manual alphabet into her hand and acquainting her with the names of familiar people and objects. The child's first important discovery was that *everything has a name*. Endowed with unusual powers of mind and eagerness of spirit, she learned rapidly. Soon she was able to read in raised type; to write letters; to express herself not merely in name-words but in fluent sentences; to master an understanding of purely abstract conceptions, like love, goodness, and God. When the little girl was ten, Miss Sullivan began to teach her to express herself orally, using her organs of speech to form and utter words she had never heard. But "Teacher" did not stop with the mechanics of education; she gave the child access to the full pageantry of life. On their daily walks through the woods, she opened to her the beauty of nature. At lesson time, she made her aware not merely of the facts of history, literature, and science, but of the indomitable human spirit behind them. And to her tasks, day by day, year by year, the child brought the most indomitable spirit of them all. Under the wisdom and loving-kindness of "Teacher's" guidance, Helen Keller emerged from an imprisoned little organism into a gracious, compassionate woman, of singular intellectual attainments and compelling personal charm. The earthly association of "Teacher" and her gifted pupil was ended by the death of Mrs. Macy, in 1936. The spirit of Anne Sullivan Macy remains the lode-star of Helen Keller's life.

A High Calling

After earning the B.A. degree at Radcliffe College, Helen Keller chose as her vocation the improvement of conditions among the handicapped, and many of our present reforms in the care and education of the blind and the deaf are the direct results of her tireless efforts.

Upon meeting Helen Keller, one is conscious first of her radiance and charm. She is vitally alive. Her handclasp is warm and eager. Her ready smile gives evidence of the innate sympathy with life and human beings that is the essence of rich living. Although the range and scope of her interests are astonishingly wide, she is anything but a blue-stocking. She has a sparkling sense of humor, and enters zestfully into conversation. She hears either by lip-reading or by manual alphabet translation. When words have been conveyed directly to her, she makes an almost involuntary gesture of eagerness and replies immediately, in spoken sentences couched in diction of singular aptness and beauty.

In talking with Helen Keller, one is, indeed, aware of a "difference" between her and other people—a difference that lies in Miss Keller's keener sensitivity, her greater awareness of beauty, her richer ability to distill her impressions into their purest essence. Where the average person looks without truly seeing and listens without truly hearing, Miss Keller penetrates straight to the core of her experiences and reaches their basic truth. Not only has she conquered the barriers of darkness and silence for herself but she is able to interpret human experiences for others in terms of a poetic insight granted only to a few.

In the following interview, Helen Keller sets forth her impressions of music. Whether or not she perceives tonal vibrations in the same way that others do, seems less important than the fact that she does perceive them, and that she accepts them with the deeply sensitive responsiveness that each composer must have desired as the finest haven for his expression. It takes two artists to complete a master work—one to create it, the other to comprehend it; and of the hundreds of professional musicians and connoisseurs, to whom this reporter has talked about music, none has revealed a deeper comprehension of the soul of music than Helen Keller.

* * *

"I am very pleased to talk to THE ETUDE. It is a magazine which I have known and admired for a long time. Of especial interest to me have been the occasional articles appearing there, in which blind people tell of the joy that music brings to their lives.

"Music is an important part of my life. It reaches me in a very pleasant way. There are all kinds of vibrations which I recognize easily in the various instruments. The vibrations usually penetrate through the floor and the furniture; if I am in a room in which music is being performed, I feel it through the arms of my chair, through my feet, through my body. If I place my hand upon the instrument, or upon the lips and throat of a singer, the tones of the music reach me in a distinct *forte*. In this way, it is easy for me to distinguish between the different kinds of music. For instance, there is the harp, deep and resonant like the wind in the pines, quite as I feel it when I walk through the woods. The violin has all the beauty of the human voice in it. It is so delicate; its tones range the entire span between joys and sorrows. In the organ I feel the might and thunder of the ocean, as its waves rise and fall and roll away.

"I also get the rhythm and the spirit of music. I know if it is dreamy, pathetic, or bright. I know jazz, too—and sometimes I like it! Jazz is an excellent accompaniment for dancing. I enjoy dancing, particularly if I have a good partner. The waltz, I think, is my favorite, though I am

Helen Keller with her favorite pet

not averse to the rhumba, either! The rhythm of dance music is so marked that it is easy for me to follow it and keep in good time. But dance music, of course, is quite apart from the tonal splendors of the great master works that penetrate our souls and bring a message of comfort and of faith.

Favorite Composer

"Of all the composers, Beethoven is my favorite. In the majesty of his utterance, now stark, now tender, one recognizes the voice of all humanity speaking. Especially do I love his "Fifth Symphony," because I realize that it is his supreme triumph over deafness. I try not to miss hearing the "Fifth Symphony." If it is included in a radio program, I am tempted to leave whatever task I may have before me to go downstairs to listen to it. I am also very fond of Wagner—particularly the scene in which *Brünnhilde* is put to sleep—and of the Russian composers. Tschalkowsky's music wears the color of sadness, it is so full of longing.

"I have had the privilege of having Heifetz play for me; and Caruso sang for me. I shall never forget that. He said he wanted to sing his best for me—a gallant compliment. He chose passages from "Samson et Dalila," climaxing the treat with the lament that *Samson* utters when he has been blinded. Caruso revealed the deep understanding of a great soul as well as the magnificence of a great voice. I was spellbound, feeling a river of pure beauty flowing into my hand.

"It was also a delight to meet Alec Templeton and to hear him play. He is not only a gifted musician but a poet. He puts his very soul into what he plays. And the ease with which he creates music, playing off his impressions with the same fluency with which another person speaks! He played an impression of me, making the keyboard tell just how I seemed to him. It was truly remarkable. The resulting harmonies embarrassed me, but touched and pleased me, too.

Music in Nature

"Although I do not play myself, I had a marvelous experience in the Mormon Tabernacle not long ago, when I visited that great church during a lecture tour. The organist kindly allowed me to sit beside him and play upon his magnificent instrument. That is, I struck a few notes with trepidation, feeling that I was presumptuous. But I enjoyed it immensely, and the organist generously said that he would incorporate my notes into a theme.

"Actually, I have been in contact with music all my life—with man-made music as well as with the wonderful music of nature which reaches me daily in the rustle of leaves, the whirring of birds' wings, and the rushing of streams. As a child, I loved to hear the piano talk. That was even before Teacher came to me. I have enjoyed music ever since. One of my great musical memories is the concert of the NBC Symphony Orchestra, with Toscanini conducting, which I attended. I shall never forget the thrilling sensations I had, sitting there in the full midst of that rushing tide of harmony."

(As regards Miss Keller's visit to the NBC studios, it is interesting to note that her means of listening, through vibrations, and the ideal of radio transmission, (*Continued on Page* 66)

How Many Music Teachers Have We?

By Dickson Skinner

THE ETUDE prints the following estimates with reservations. While we have no more definite statistics than has the writer of this article, we should say that the number of music teachers in America is far in excess of one hundred and fifty thousand. Our estimates are based upon years of personal contact, travel, correspondence, and general music sales.—EDITOR'S NOTE.

THE LAWRENCE H. SELZ organization of Chicago conducted in 1938 a survey for the National Piano Manufacturers Association, as a result of which they arrived at the conclusion that there are 6,262,676 families in the United States in which one or more members play the piano. On that basis they estimate the number of individuals who play at 9,424,014 (one and one-half times the number of families in which at least one individual plays). From reports of instrument dealers and teachers, they estimate the number who play other instruments at 4,350,000—a total of 13,744,014, not allowing for duplications. It seems unlikely that duplications would be of sufficient proportions to affect the total materially.

The president of a music publishing firm, who is considered by the Music Publishers Protective Association to be the best authority on the study of "popular" instruments, estimates that there are 700,000 students of the piano accordion and the Hawaiian guitar. The Selz estimate is that 2,100,000 play the accordion and guitar. That is a ratio of one student to two non-student players.

Applying that ratio to the estimated number of players of the piano (that is, dividing the number of players by three), we should have 3,141,338 piano students.

The survey made by THE ETUDE, in 1937, showed an average of 17.77 pupils per teacher. Dividing the estimate of piano pupils by this figure, we should obtain an estimate of 176,777 piano teachers.

But surveys made by THE ETUDE found that 42.8 per cent of the teachers had less than eleven pupils. It may safely be assumed that, except for a negligible number of high-priced teachers, those with no more than ten pupils are not making their livelihood chiefly from their teaching and belong rather in the class of "pin-money teachers" than in the professional classification. Deducting this percentage of the estimated total of 176,777, we have left an estimate of 101,117 professional piano teachers.

This checks rather accurately with the estimate of Irl Allison, President of the National Guild of Piano Teachers, who says, "I believe there are at least 100,000 active (piano) teachers, and many more who teach for pin money."

Applying the same method to the Selz estimate of a total of 13,774,014 instrument players, we reach an estimate of a total of about 155,000 professional instrument teachers.

This checks closely with the census figures. Under the classification "Musicians and Teachers of Music," the figure in the 1920 census was a little over 130,000; in the 1930 census, a little over 165,000, an increase of approximately twenty-seven per cent in the decade.

The American Federation of Musicians (musicians' union) has a membership of about 128,000, of whom they estimate that about half would be classified as musicians, for census purposes—that is, they receive the greater portion of their income from work as musicians.

The census figure is undoubtedly made up chiefly of instrumental teachers and of the professionally active members of the union. The voice teachers and concert artists, who would not also be included in one or the other of these groups, are probably too few in number to affect an estimate based on figures as to instrumental teachers and union members.

The current opinion among leading music educators seems to indicate that the figures of the 1940 census will show at least as great a percentage of increase during the decade as the figures of 1930 showed. Because of the great growth in public school music during the 1930's, the percentage may well be still higher. In view of that fact, the following comparison seems fairly conclusive:

1. If the increase were the same (that is approximately twenty-seven per cent) the census figure in 1940 would be somewhat more than 209,500.

2. If 64,000 for the musicians' union be added to the present estimate of 155,000 teachers, the result is 219,000.

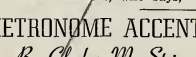
This check would seem to indicate a reasonable degree of accuracy in the estimate and to support the conclusion that there are in the United States to-day approximately 155,000 professional teachers of music.

METRONOME ACCENTS

By Gladys M. Stein

Young music students often have only vague ideas concerning time signatures, and where the accents fall in the various rhythms. To clear up this subject and to help these pupils develop a strong feeling for rhythm, the writer suggests a plan which has proved very successful in her class.

Begin the lesson with a blackboard drill on time signatures, and where the accents fall in each of them:



Then place the metronome where it can easily be seen and heard by each pupil in the class, and start it ticking at about 100.

Ask the pupils to clap their hands with every tick until they can do it steadily. Then begin with the two-beat time signature and have them clap with the metronome, but accent the first count of every measure.

After they have done this correctly for a half dozen measures, let them shift to the three-beat signature; then to the four beat; to the six beat; back to the three-beat signature; and so forth. All of these changes must be done at the teacher's command, and without stopping the clapping or missing a metronome tick.

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(*Continued from Page* 63)

then you will still be able to impress your listeners with a satisfactory performance.

Players frequently have the idea that, in order to impress an audience, they must show how fast they can rush through a certain piece of music; they completely forget that a beautiful tone, shades of expression, and proper phrasing are the most important things in the rendition of any musical composition. These last suggestions may well be followed by players of the banjo and mandolin.

In a recent letter, one of our readers wanted to know "whether there are women who play the guitar professionally and how they compare with the well known guitarists among the men?" We are glad to state that the men have no monopoly on guitar playing, and we can point to several members of the fair sex who have earned an enviable reputation as interpreters of guitar music. Louise Walker of Vienna is considered the outstanding virtuoso guitarist in Central Europe. She began her study of the guitar when five years of age. After receiving a thorough musical training, she gave her first guitar recital at the age of fourteen. Since then, this artist has appeared in all the important music centers of Europe. She also gave two recitals in New York City, a few years ago. Miss Walker possesses a flawless technic and produces a large, beautiful tone on her chosen instrument. Her recital programs contain the best in guitar literature, including works of the classic and modern composers.

Other Women Guitarists

Ida Presti, a resident of Paris, is hailed as another fine guitarist who has given many recitals. A well known French critic says: "Ida Presti is an astonishing and most prodigious guitar virtuoso. Gifted with an irresistible inclination for this wonderful instrument, she produces a brilliant sonority of tone, has an extremely varied range of expression and incomparable musicianship, and it is an enchanting experience to listen to this artist."

Alice De Belleroche resides in England, where she is looked upon as a virtuoso guitarist. She has given concerts in Belgium, Germany, England, and France, and frequently broadcasts from London. Miss De Belleroche was a pupil of Andres Segovia and Matilde Cuervas. Matilde Cuervas, wife of the Spanish guitar virtuoso, Emile Pujol, is an artist of great attainment. She is looked upon as the greatest exponent of the "Flamenco" style of guitar playing.

The South American City, Buenos Aires, is the home of many excellent guitarists. But, according to opinions expressed by Miguel Llobet and Andres Segovia, Maria Luisa Anido deserves the greatest honors. This artist has appeared in numerous recitals, and from her pen have come many fine arrangements of classic numbers for guitar.

Last but not least, we must mention the name of Vahdah Olcott Bickford of Los Angeles, California. This fine guitarist has given concerts in many cities in the United States, individually and in conjunction with her husband, Myron Bickford. Technically well equipped, Mrs. Bickford has published quite a number of excellent transcriptions of classical compositions.

What Music Means to Helen Keller

(*Continued from Page* 8)

which requires an absence of vibration, nearly caused an impasse. The studios are built of solid concrete which does not conduct vibrations. For that very reason, Miss Keller cannot hear through concrete. The difficulty was solved by placing a small wooden platform under her chair. When Toscanini appeared on the stage, the audience began applauding. Miss Keller at once perceived the clapping and joined in.)

"As to the niceties of nuancing and phrasing, I have, alas, to accept the interpretation of others, adding my own fancy to it. But I always get the essential meaning of a composition; I know whether it is a dream, a tragedy, or a tossing-out of laughter.

"Music means much to me. It rests me after a day's hard work, and it gives me happy anticipations of the harmonies I shall some day hear as well as feel with my fingers. Some day—who knows?—how wonderful it will be if I find music turned into color! I feel that music should give us greater faith in this day of crisis for the world. I mean faith in the inner resources which God has bestowed upon all of us. That spiritual power alone can help us to endure and to hope and to cling to our ideals and desires, until the great darkness of the world rolls away and we see the light of peace healing the nations. Music may be a means, perhaps, of helping to bring about this ultimate healing. For the wonderful thing is that, no matter what language we speak, we can all understand music. It is a bond of beauty, stronger and more enduring than all discord."

• • •

"He who combines the useful with the agreeable, carries off the prize."
—Horace.

How an Accordionist Projects Rhythm

(*Continued from Page* 61)

Each measure is short the time of a sixteenth note, and naturally there can be no rhythm. Those who are preparing for orchestra playing should be particularly careful that each measure receives its full count.

Students are often not content to play music which is within their technical ability. They are impatient to play difficult music; consequently, when they struggle through a selection which is beyond their scope they cannot play it rhythmically. It is all they can do to find the correct keys and buttons. We urge those who are guilty of this fault to bear in mind that a listener derives more pleasure from hearing an accordionist play a simple selection rhythmically correct, than to hear him struggle through a masterpiece in a slovenly, unrhythmic manner.

Rhythm is a gift bestowed upon some musicians. It is so natural for them that they would find it almost impossible to play any other way. Those who do not have the gift can cultivate a sense of rhythm if they will make a serious study of it; and they will find that when once the problem is conquered, they will always play rhythmically.

The first important thing to remember is that the fingers should always be prepared a little in advance over the piano key or bass button which they are to play, and then they will always play in correct time. The next thing is to enunciate all accents distinctly so there will always be the constant forward progression. Some students make the mistake of neglecting this subject until they are well advanced in all other studies on the accordion, but this is not right. Practice for rhythmic playing should begin with simple exercises and scales, and, when these are once mastered, there will be no difficulty on future studies.

We urge accordionists to analyze their playing and see whether they are merely playing correct time, or whether they are projecting the rhythm.

* * * * *

Pietro Deiro will answer questions about accordion playing. Letters should be addressed to him in care of THE ETUDE, 1712 Chestnut Street., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

CORRECTION

On Page 706 of THE ETUDE for October 1941, reference was made to Francisco Braga as the composer of the *Angel's Serenade*. This of course is incorrect, as it was Gaetano Braga, an Italian composer, who wrote this widely known piece.

Debussy And the Pedals

(*Continued from Page* 20)

the G string sounding in sympathy with it, thus enriching the tone quality of the C string with gentle sounds of the G string. Try it with the E Key held down silently. With other keys held down silently the overtones in many instances come out stronger in sympathy than the fundamental.

The beautifying (damper or loud) pedal, as the writer prefers to call it, by raising the dampers, functions on a grand scale in permitting all the strings to vibrate in sympathy with each tone as it is sounded. It is not difficult to see how these effects may be used to great artistic advantage when properly employed in playing Debussy's music.

Una Corda (Soft) Pedal

The *una corda* (soft) pedal has been insufficiently exploited with a consequent loss of a great variety of tone color in piano performance. The difference between the softest *pianissimo* (*pp*) possible *without* the una corda pedal and the softest *pianissimo* (*ppp*) *with* the una corda pedal adds that much more tone color to the pianist's palette. Also the *una corda* pedal plays an important part in equalizing the power of the long strings of the low bass with the shorter string of the treble. When used simultaneously with the beautifying (damper or loud) pedal it softens and mellows the low bass and proportionately strengthens the treble tones.

Coördinated Fingers and Feet

Detailed directions are found in the *Reverie* to which reference has been made. The crescendos and diminuendos for individualized voice expression, tone volume for each voice, the fluctuating crescendo and fluctuating diminuendo; and the beautifying pedal directions, are all complete; as are fingering and phrasing. The una corda pedal is indicated by the words e *sempre una corda* which simply directs that the left foot be set upon the una corda pedal and kept there throughout while the right foot engages the beautifying pedal as directed. Sound the melody tones brilliantly, even in their *pianissimo* softness, with decisive finger strokes; while the secondary or accompaniment tones are sounded with a mellow tone quality, even if *fortissimo* dynamic power were desired. The remainder rests with the good taste of the performer and his understanding of the tonal message which the composition is meant to convey.

* * * * *

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